We proudly present the following article, by Ross H. Gast of Los Angeles. Mr. Gast is probably better qualified to prepare such an article than any man living. His many travels throughout the tropical world and his careful research through botanical records in two continents, along with his ability to express himself, makes a unique combination. Mr. Gast is a charter member of our Society and has held the position of Director-At-Large since the first meeting. With his permission, we plan to print this article later in a pamphlet form, since the length makes it necessary to give it to you now as a continued story.

HISTORICAL NOTES ON HIBISCUS

The name hibiscus was first used by the ancient Greeks in referring to what is now known as the Marsh Mallow, the annual form of hibiscus, which by the way, should be more widely grown. The word hibiscus is said to have been derived from Ibis, the stork, which was fond of the leaves and branches. As you know, the hibiscus family is quite large, represented by 150 species of herbs, shrubs and trees. Many of these are natives of the tropics, and while their growing habits vary widely, almost all members of the genus have large, showy flowers. My discussion, however, will cover in detail only the forms we have come to call Rosa-Sinensis, or Rose of China, although some of the closely related species of the family which will cross with Rosa-Sinensis will be described. These are H. Cameronii from Madagascar, H. Schizopetalus from Africa and the several native Hawaiian species. Crosses with H. Syriacus or Althea, and with H. Liliflorus, have been reported, but I have seen no authoritative evidence to support this.

As is the case with most plant families, the botanical history of hibiscus is fragmentary and confusing. Even now, there is a good deal of difference in opinion, particularly as regards the Hawaiian species, but I understand that some recent studies, which I have not had an opportunity to see, have clarified the picture somewhat. I have, however, drawn some of the earlier horticultural works, and as you are primarily interested in horticulture, I shall not dwell on the botany of the plant. Another reason (and a very good one) is that I have no scientific background to support me in such a discussion. I am just a business man who has spent too much time away from his business doing what should properly have been the business of others.

The exact date that hibiscus were first brought to Europe and America has not been determined, but they were being grown in English greenhouses early in the Eighteenth Century and there is published evidence that George Washington grew the plant in his greenhouses at about the same time. It's introduction into this country could have been directly from India or China, or even the South Seas, or it could have come in from the West Indies, to which area it was brought early by the English and the French. The West Indies, in fact, was a source that most Florida pioneers drew upon for their stock during the late Eighteenth Century. In England and the Colonies, hibiscus was grown as a "stove" plant, either in tubs, or as a "wall plant", trained to conservatory walls. Because it thrives in tubs, it has always been a greenhouse favorite in areas where it cannot be planted outside. As I shall try to prove later, we are "missing a bet" by not taking advantage of this fact.

.....end of first installment.